

▶▶ making a difference

By Kelly Kilmer
Photos by Rachelle Foster, Vast Media

Bahar Ranjbar

SURAYYA ANNE FOUNDATION

Bahar Ranjbar was 5 years old, living in Iran, walking with her mother, she came up upon a homeless man selling matches for much-needed money. Bahar was not satisfied with her mother purchasing a few matches, so she pleaded that they take him in and give him food and shelter. Bahar's mother, being protective for good reason, did not allow him to go home with them, but together they purchased all of the matches to help out. It was then and there Bahar remembers making a decision that she would be a helper to the world, whether it be a doctor or founder of a community organization.

Today, here in Tulsa, Bahar is a top-producing REALTOR® while working with the organization she co-founded, the Surayya Anne Foundation. Bahar is able to balance her real estate career at Keller Williams Realty Preferred with the foundation well, in fact, her very first real estate transaction in January 2014 was the purchase of the land for the location of the foundation. Bahar shares that her first commission on that deal was \$9000.00, which she immediately donated to the foundation.

A bit of history can be gathered from the foundation's website:

The Surayya Anne Foundation project started over a conversation at a kitchen table. A group of women who were involved in many projects in the Tulsa

Muslim community were discussing various needs from their perspective in the growing community. The discussion opened with the specific needs of female Muslim inmates that were re-entering the community after incarceration. However, after a short time, it became clear that there were many women, facing various degrees of difficulty, due to life transitions, that needed help.

One month after this first conversation, the same group of women gathered for a brainstorm session to come up with ideas about how to meet the needs of the Tulsa female community. It was at this meeting that the group was introduced to the works of a woman from Turkey who was the spiritual driving force behind the women's programs for a foundation in Istanbul: Surayya Anne, (ahm-ne), or Mother Surayya. It was her spirit, drive, dedication to the needy, and compassion for all human beings that became the example of things that could be done in Tulsa with a lot of hard work and dedication.

It was one month later, in October 2007, that the foundation took form and a list of priorities was developed. That same month the 501c3 status was applied for and by January 2008 the foundation was well on its way. It was decided at inception that the foundation would focus on Muslim women and children who were:

- Homeless
- Faced chronic or long-term illnesses
- Faced separation from families and spouses for whatever reason
- Were returning to society from incarceration

The foundation has always had a priority to the Muslim community due to the fact that we had a clientele that had many special

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••• considerations including diet and daily life; however, it was always understood that **ANYONE** – regardless of race, religion, or creed – would be considered for our services. The foundation has proudly been able to maintain this standard to this day, and for that reason, it has never been designated as a religious organization: it is a humanitarian organization.

In 2009, the Surayya Anne Foundation opened its first “shelter” apartment. Over the years, apartments have been added as needed and today there are six apartments used to meet the needs of women and children in the Tulsa community. Also, since this time there has been a continuous growth in the number of programs that have been added to the roster of possible ways the foundation can reach out to the community. Only to name a few:

- Food collections
- Hajj assistance
- Meat distributions
- Education grants for college
- Clothing, blankets, and other household item collections and distributions
- Medical, dental and prescription assistance
- Rent and Utility Assistance

Bahar shares that the foundation served over 1,100 people in the last year, despite the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are currently building a medical clinic where local doctors will donate their time on a couple hours per month basis. They are thrilled to have the assistance of general care physicians, OB/GYNs, dentists, optometrists and other specialists. At the moment they have several needs and there are ways you can help and the easiest way is to go to the group's Facebook page and like/follow. There are many needs posted there in the group. Home furnishings are always in need like sofas and mattresses.

The foundation also has a need for an Executive Director and they are looking for a grant or sponsorship from a major group to fund a salary for this position. They are also seeking a social media manager that may be able to donate their time. Are any of these items something you can help with? Please contact the foundation through their Facebook page, website or contact Bahar. More information is on the



group's webpage www.surayyaannefoundation.org.

